

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A conversion assembly for enabling or improving wheelchair accessibility to a front-wheel-drive vehicle, wherein said assembly comprises rear suspension mountings for fixing to the structure of the vehicle in place of an existing rear suspension such that a portion of a floorpan of the vehicle of sufficient width to accommodate the width of a wheelchair can be lowered between said rear suspension mountings.

2. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 1, wherein the conversion assembly is such that the lowered portion of the floorpan extends forwardly from a rear entrance of the vehicle such that a wheelchair is able to be driven from the rear entrance to a driver's position to enable the occupant of the wheelchair to drive the vehicle from the wheelchair.

3. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 1, wherein the conversion assembly is such that the lowered portion of the floorpan extends forwardly from a rear entrance of the vehicle such that a wheelchair is able to be driven from the rear entrance to a front row passenger position of the vehicle where the wheelchair is restrained during driving of the vehicle to enable the occupant of the wheelchair to occupy the wheelchair in the front row passenger position during driving of the vehicle.

4. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 1, wherein the pair of rear suspension mountings comprises a pair of independent rear suspension mountings.

5. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 4, wherein each of the rear suspension mountings includes:

an independent rear trailing arm suspension component comprising an elongated arm having a pivotal coupling at a front end thereof for enabling the elongated arm to pivot with respect to the structure of the vehicle about an axis substantially transverse to the longitudinal axis of the elongated arm;

a wheel mounting for mounting a wheel of the vehicle longitudinally spaced from the axis of rotation of the elongated arm;

a spring mounting for mounting a spring between the elongated arm and the structure of the vehicle; and

a shock absorber mounting for mounting a shock absorber between the elongated arm and the structure of the vehicle.

6. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein the pivotal coupling comprises a bearing arrangement at the front end of the elongated arm.

7. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein the shock absorber mounting comprises a shock absorber mounting bracket at a rear end of the elongated arm.

8. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein the spring comprises at least one of a coil spring and an air spring, and wherein the spring mounting comprises a seating in an upper surface of the elongated arm for receiving a lower end of the at least of a coil spring and air spring.

9. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 5, wherein the wheel mounting comprises a wheel mounting bracket mounted to an outer side of the elongated arm.

10. A conversion assembly as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a chassis frame for attaching to an existing chassis of the vehicle, the chassis frame being adapted for mounting said rear suspension mountings thereon.

11. A front-wheel-drive vehicle having an existing rear suspension and converted for enabling or improving wheelchair accessibility to the vehicle with a conversion assembly comprising rear suspension mountings for fixing to the structure of the vehicle in place of the existing rear suspension such that a portion of a floorpan of the vehicle of sufficient width to accommodate the width of a wheelchair can be lowered between said rear suspension mountings.

12. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the conversion assembly is such that the lowered portion of the floorpan extends forwardly from a rear entrance of the vehicle such that a wheelchair is able to be driven from the rear entrance to a driver's position to enable the occupant of the wheelchair to drive the vehicle from the wheelchair.

13. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the vehicle has wheelchair accessibility to the rear of the vehicle through a doorway at the rear of the vehicle.

14. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the existing rear suspension comprises a rear beam axle.

15. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the lowered portion of the floorpan is at least 760mm wide.

16. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 15, wherein the lowered portion of the floorpan is at least 840mm wide.

17. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 16, wherein the lowered portion of the floorpan is 850mm wide.

18. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the lowered portion of the floorpan is substantially flat.

19. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the vehicle is provided with a restraining belt, the restraining belt being anchored to the vehicle at either side of a space in which the wheelchair is to be located during driving of the vehicle, for restraining the occupant of the wheelchair.

20. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 19, wherein the belt is anchored to the vehicle on one side of the space in which the wheelchair is to be located during driving of the vehicle, by way of a belt mounting frame fixed to the structure of the vehicle.

21. A front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 11, wherein the vehicle is provided with locking restraints for locking the wheelchair in place during driving of the vehicle.

22. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle to enable or improve wheelchair accessibility to the vehicle, the method including the steps of:

removing an existing rear suspension from the vehicle;

installing rear suspension mountings to the vehicle, one at each side of the structure of the vehicle; and

lowering a portion of the floorpan of the vehicle between said rear suspension mountings.

23. A method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the lowered portion of the floorpan extends forwardly from a rear entrance of the vehicle such that a wheelchair is able to be driven from the rear entrance to a driver's position where the wheelchair is restrained during

driving of the vehicle to enable the occupant of the wheelchair to drive the vehicle from the wheelchair.

24. A method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the lowered portion of the floorpan extends forwardly from a rear entrance of the vehicle such that a wheelchair is able to be driven from the rear entrance to a front row passenger position of the vehicle where the wheelchair is restrained during driving of the vehicle to enable the occupant of the wheelchair to occupy the wheelchair in the front row passenger position during driving of the vehicle.

25. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 22, wherein installing rear suspension mountings to the vehicle, one at each side of the structure of the vehicle comprises installing independent rear suspension mountings.

26. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 25, wherein the method further includes the step of attaching an additional chassis frame to an existing chassis of the vehicle, the additional chassis frame being adapted for mounting said pair of independent rear suspension mountings thereon.

27. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 22, wherein the step of lowering the portion of the floorpan of the vehicle includes lowering the portion of the floorpan such that the lowered portion of the floorpan is at least 760mm wide.

28. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 27, wherein the step of lowering the portion of the floorpan of the vehicle includes lowering the portion of the floorpan such that the lowered portion of the floorpan is at least 840mm wide.

29. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 28, wherein the step of lowering the portion of the floorpan of the vehicle includes lowering the portion of the floorpan such that the lowered portion of the floorpan is 850mm wide.

30. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 22, wherein the step of lowering the portion of the floorpan of the vehicle includes lowering the portion of the floorpan such that the lowered portion of the floorpan is substantially flat.

31. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 22, wherein the method further includes the step of installing a restraining belt and anchoring the restraining belt to the vehicle at either side of a space in which the wheelchair is to be located during driving of the vehicle, for restraining the occupant of the wheelchair.

32. A method of converting a front-wheel-drive vehicle as claimed in claim 31, wherein the method further includes the step of fixing a belt mounting frame to the structure of the vehicle on one side of said space, the belt mounting frame being for mounting the restraining belt.

33. An independent rear trailing arm suspension component for a front-wheel-drive vehicle requiring wheelchair access comprising:

- an elongated arm having a pivotal coupling at a front end thereof for enabling the elongated arm to pivot with respect to a structure of the vehicle about an axis substantially transverse to the longitudinal axis of the elongated arm;

- a wheel mounting for mounting a wheel of the vehicle longitudinally spaced from the axis of rotation of the elongated arm;

- a spring mounting for mounting a spring between the elongated arm and the structure of the vehicle; and

- a shock absorber mounting for mounting a shock absorber between the elongated arm and the structure of the vehicle.